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ABSTRACT

Despite attempts by educators to implement sound programs in multiethnic education, there is conceptual confusion, philosophical conflict, and widespread disagreement about what should be the proper role of public schools and universities in the ethnic education of students, in recognition of minority groups, which include, but are not limited to, Afro-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians. Multiethnic education encompasses the study of ethnic cultures and experiences, institutional changes within school settings to provide equal educational opportunities, and promoting the concept of ethnic diversity. Goals for multiethnic education include providing all students with skills, attitudes, and knowledge to function within their ethnic culture, the mainstream culture, and within and across other ethnic cultures; helping mastery of essential reading, writing, and computational skills; reducing the pain and discrimination experienced in school and the wider society because of unique racial, physical, and cultural characteristics; and aiding students in reaching their potential. Educators need social and cultural awareness training which includes development of interpersonal skills to understand cultural differences and perspectives of minority students. Without endorsement from governmental and educational policy makers and opinion leaders, financial support for multiethnic education and transformation of desegregated schools into truly integrated schools cannot occur. (NEC)

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"Multiethnic Perspectives on Education"

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Abstract

The emphasis of multiethnic perspectives on education is focused on increasing our knowledge about education and schooling of Afro-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Veitnamese Americans and American Indians. This will include cultural priorities and influence of socio-cultural traditions.

Specifically, American education may no longer safely ignore our Afro-Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans and American Indians nor the white Americans who do not have an Anglo-Saxon Western European background.

Our basic and inescapable need is to learn how to understand and to communicate with people of differing ethnicity. This problem begins at home, among our own schools and college communities.

This paper is designed to encourage educators to accept professional responsibility for the preparation of a generation of youth, by seeing them in a larger perspective, that will find cultural differences both positive and valuable.

What most of us don't understand is how ignorant our educators are about ethnic minorities, and how noticeable that ignorance is becoming. The challenge to educators is clear. We cannot ignore the ethnic minority scene. If we are ever to live and work harmoniously with ethnic minorities, we need to help those with whom we work to develop attitudes conducive to better understanding among all peoples. One concrete method for promoting this understanding is by introducing multiethnic perspectives on education to those who work with students. By adding this dimension, the educator can begin to ensure that students and colleagues

will be exposed to the kinds of differences with which all of us must be confronted. Hopefully, the cumulative effect of this action will be a constructive influence on the development of positive feelings toward America's ethnic minorities.

MULTIETHNIC PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION

National Association for Women Deans

Administrators and Counselors

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin

April 10, 1985

There seems to be a widespread consensus among educators that the state of education with respect to multiethnic education is still in need of attention.

Multiethnic education emerged from the turmoil of the 1960's when students, faculty, community leaders, and political activists rocked the very foundations of education. Multiethnic education is now facing difficult times perhaps even more than it faced in its early formative years.

Despite the attempts by educators to implement sound programs in multiethnic education, there is conceptual confusion, philosophical conflicts, and widespread disagreement about what should be the proper role of the public schools and universities in the ethnic education of students, in recognition of all minority groups, which includes, but is not limited to, Afro-Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and American Indians.

Programs related to ethnic education are often conceptualized differently and are known by a variety of names, such as multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural, ethnic studies and global education (Banks, 1981).

Since an ethnic group is a unique kind of cultural group, multiethnic education is a specific form of multicultural

education. Multiethnic education is concerned with modifying the total school environment so that it is more reflective of the ethnic diversity within American society. This includes not only the study of ethnic cultures and experiences but making institutional changes within the school setting so that students from diverse ethnic groups have equal educational opportunities and the school promotes and encourages the concept of ethnic diversity (Banks, 1981).

Ethnic studies may be defined as the scientific and humanistic study of the history, cultures, and experiences of the ethnic groups within a society. It includes a study of ethnic minority groups such as the four ethnic groups mentioned earlier. Ethnic studies refers primarily to the objectives, methods, and materials that make up the courses of study within schools and colleges. Thus, the boundaries of ethnic studies are more limited than either multicultural or multiethnic education. Multiethnic programs are comparative, conceptual, interdisciplinary and cut across subject content.

However, because we live in a highly interdependent global world society, the school should help students develop the knowledge, attitudes, and understanding needed to function within cultures outside the United States. Global educators point out, however, that global education in the United States is experiencing problems that in many ways parallel those of multiethnic education.

Because of their interrelationships and shared goals, educators should try to better relate multiethnic and global education. By so doing, it would help reduce the tremendous fragmentation

that now characterizes the school curriculum as well as contribute to a valuable acquisition of knowledge and understanding about other cultures. If students develop the ability to view events and situations from the perspectives of ethnic groups in this country, they will be better able to view events within other countries from the perspectives of the peoples of those countries. Although multicultural education, multiethnic education, and global education differ in emphasis, these three educational reform movements are linked by common concerns. Cortes (1976) writes insightfully about those relationships stating that all three seek to improve human and intergroup relations. Each seeks to increase awareness of the impact of global and national forces, trends, and institutions on different groups of people. Each seeks to reduce stereotyping and increase intergroup understanding, improve intercultural communication and help to make today's students more effective future participants on the issues facing the changing state of the world (Stikes, 1984).

Like all persons, Afro-Americans, Hispanic Americans, American Indians and Asian Americans learn their values, feelings, behaviors and identities from their cultural conditioning. What they learn depends upon the expectations, opportunities, and reinforcement offered in their culture. Culture is the total way of life of a people--it includes their beliefs, values, attitudes, expectations and behaviors used by them in a social group.

Cultural values are tremendously important, and different kinds of values operate in the Black Community, Hispanic Community, Asian-American Community and the American Indian Community than in the white communities. If educators are to

facilitate the development of the ethnic minorities, they need to understand and be able to relate to their developmental backgrounds and potentials. They need to know if and how cultural expectations, and reinforcement have influenced the intellectual, emotional, social, moral and physical development of the students (Stikes, 1984).

Educators need training in order to understand the cultural differences and the unique racial perspective of minority students. Such training should include interpersonal skills and social and cultural awareness training. Lack of understanding quite often generates conflict, discomfort, and miscommunication. Furthermore, school personnel need to understand how to resolve the predictable racial conflicts generated in an environment encompassing the problems of people from different ethnic groups (Quinn, 1967).

The social and cultural awareness is very important. Many educators cannot see the impact of race, class, and culture on themselves and on the attitudes and values that minority students bring to the environment. They do not understand the lack of trust that students have developed. They do not understand the coping strategies used by minority students to deal with success, achievement, defeat and racism. Quite often, many educators want to deny the fact that significant culture differences affect outcomes in secondary and higher education. However, these differences must be confronted and experienced in order that educators may see that they do have an impact on policy and administration.

The teaching/learning atmosphere can be improved. Many colleges, while maintaining their traditional commitment to the

liberal arts, are beginning to explore new directions in their curricula. The trend at many institutions is a requirement that all students take a course devoted to some aspects of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and the non-white peoples of North America so that the students would have a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences in cultures.

Although the cultures of all ethnic groups are alike in certain fundamental ways, they differ from one another in many detailed ways. They vary, for example, with respect to language; one uses English, another Spanish, and a third may speak Vietnamese. In fact, cultures differ from one another so much that no one of them is precisely like any other in all details (Phi Delta Kappan, 1983). We must understand that students' language and relationships can result in cultural conflict. The academic achievement problems may very well be linked with their language skills problems. If language deficiencies interact with their language differences, communication problems become complicated.

Education for acculturation is still a viable goal as we push for cultural identity. One of the major goals of multiethnic education is to provide all students with the skills, attitudes and knowledge they need to function within their ethnic culture, the mainstream culture, as well as within and across other ethnic cultures. The Anglo-American student should be familiar with Black English, and Spanish. The Afro-American student and the Spanish-speaking student should be able to speak and write standard English and to function successfully within Anglo-American institutions.

The evolution of bilingual education has caused us to recognize

the fact that social context affects learning outcomes in bilingual settings. Programs that immerse students in a second language are successful only when they do not stigmatize the students' primary languages and home cultures. Much experimentation and learning took place during the 1970's-1980's in the areas of language and cognitive development, but not all the findings were pleasant. The most publicized negative findings were those of the report by the American Institute of Research (AIR) which suggested that students enrolled in Title VII bilingual programs did not achieve at a higher level than counterparts who were not enrolled in such a program. However, Doris Gunderson points out that:

> Although there is insufficient research documenting the effect of bilingual education, there is no research to substantiate the claim that bilingual education and bilingualism are harmful. Moreover, the available research indicates that bilingual education is either beneficial or neutral in terms of scholastic achievement, giving the student the added advantage of exposure to two languages (Banks, 1981).

Still another important goal of multiethnic education is to help students master essential reading, writing, and computational skills. Multiethnic education assumes that multiethnic content can help students to master important skills in these areas. Students are more likely to master skills when the teacher uses content that deals with significant human problems such as ethnicity within our society. Students are also more likely to master skills when they study content and problems related to

the environment in which they live. Many students live within highly ethnic communities. Content related to ethnicity in American society and to the ethnic communities in which many students live is not only significant, but meaningful to students, especially t those who are socialized within ethnic communities.

Another major goal of multiethnic education is to reduce the pain and discrimination members of some ethnic and racial groups experience in the schools and in the wider society because of their unique racial, physical, and cultural characteristics. Groups such as Hispanic Americans, Afro-Americans, Asian Americans and American Indians often deny their ethnic identity, ethnic heritage and family in order to participate more fully in society. Emerging social science research indicates that individuals have a need for basic group identities even in highly modernized societies.

An overall goal of multiethnic education is to help all students reach their potential. Educators are given the responsibility to help students contribute to and benefit from their training. Within our pluralistic society, multiethnic education values the existing diversity, and uses that diversity in the development of effective instructional strategies for students in the classroom.

Multiethnic education is indeed at the crossroads. The future of this educational reform will influence how our students deal with racial problems and conflicts. Without active and strong support from policymakers and opinion leaders in the government, and in the education community, multiethnic education may fail in its central mission, and schools and colleges will

retreat to doing business as usual. If this happens, ethnic tensions and frustrations will grow by leaps and bounds. This is a dismal prospect but a distinct possibility even more so with Reagan-proposed budget cuts for the fiscal year 1986. The current budgetary cutbacks in education will threaten even the minimal financing that multiethnic education has received.

According to Yep (1985), AACD's proposed 1986 budget represents a substantial cut from 1985 levels in real spending. A large proportion of the proposed cuts would come from domestic discretionary programs.

Higher education is faced with massive cuts under the proposed 1986 budget, facing the risk of wiping out many of the social gains of the past.

We are certainly multiethnic. The concern, of course, is the hostility of one group toward another or, at least, the harmful attitudes of groups that discriminate against individuals and cultures (Ehlers, 1983). If multiethnic education is to have a direct focus and purpose, then educators must continue with the struggle of integration and not merely desegregation.

There is a sharp distinction between truly integrated facilities and merely desegregated. Desegregated school refers only to its racial composition. It may be a fine school, a bad one, perhaps a facility so racked with conflict that it provides poor educational opportunities for both its white and black pupils.

Desegregation, then, is the mere mix of bodies without reference to the quality of the interracial interaction. While it is a prerequisite for integration, it does not in itself

guarantee equal educational opportunities. By contrast, an integrated school refers to an integrated interracial facility which boasts a climate of interracial acceptance.

Integration, then, is a realization of equal opportunity by deliberate cooperation without regard to racial or social barriers. Integration, however, has not been realized in most schools with racially heterogeneous enrollments. Schools which may have segregated educational programs, use conventional ability grouping, reserve white school traditions while excluding other ethnic minority traditions.

Educators agree that the survival of multiethnic education will depend heavily upon the economy and the total commitment of our educators and policymakers to mobilize the resources needed to institutionalize multiethnic education in pre-school, elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions, and to help remove the racial hostility from the world of our children and their children.

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